# Understanding Community Partners’ Motivations to Participate in Academic Outreach

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The title of Derek Bok’s 1982 book, *Beyond the Ivory Tower,* is at once a call to arms for institutions of higher education to engage their local communities, and a recognition of the historical distance colleges and universities have put between themselves and the outside world. Seen historically as venues for the inculcation of democratic ideals and critical analysis, proponents are focusing on the capacity of higher education to help students and community members alike acquire the knowledge, skills, and attitudes to become active citizens and address our most pressing social needs (Maurana & Goldenberg, 1996; Harkavy, 2004; Nyden, 2003). This is particularly true in regards to addressing the state of educational advancement among those from backgrounds that typically are underrepresented in postsecondary study. Rather than accepting that K-12 and higher education occupy separate domains, proponents of a strong pipeline believe that colleges and universities must act to open opportunities for low-income students and students of color to advance past high school (Gándara, 2002a, 2005; Tierney & Jun, 2001). Thus, efforts to blur the boundaries separating college campuses from the broader community are not only motivated by potential benefits to the individual institutions, but by a sense of the social responsibility that higher education is mandated to accept.

However, at a time of substantial budgetary reductions to higher education from the public sector, “non-essential” programs are likely to face the sharpest blades, which means that institutional efforts like those that concentrate on offering assistance to underrepresented youth in preparing for and gaining admission to college are likely to face smaller budgets and declining support, all the while maintaining the same levels of expectation for the outcomes that can emerge from such efforts. Despite public commitments to meeting social need, one begins to wonder what these financial restrictions mean for partnerships that have been formed to address these issues locally. In order to understand the extent to which outreach efforts of this type fit within the ideals for reciprocal partnerships, the partnerships themselves, along with the emerging issues that impact the relationships, must be explored. This study attempts to examine how academic outreach programs emanating from the university work in partnership with their local schools to improve college eligibility among underrepresented students, and to bring to light the rationale among the school personnel for participating in such efforts.

For the purposes of this study, early academic outreach efforts on the part of higher education institutions were examined to better understand the community partners’ motivations to participate in such efforts, as well as their perspectives on how their university counterparts work in partnership to deliver services to the schools. A modification of resource dependence theory was employed to gain a more nuanced understanding of partner motivations, extending the explanation beyond a simple economic model of resource acquisition. In addition, the study explored how outreach programs affect community members’ overall view of the postsecondary institution and its commitment to addressing social issues within the community, and how reductions in funding for outreach programs impact the relationships between the university and the community. The research questions that guided the study were as follows:

1. Why do community partners participate in college preparation outreach?
2. How does the university articulate its commitment to social responsibility and diversity, and how does participation in college preparation outreach affect community partners’ views of the university’s commitment?

## Civic Interdependence

The frameworks for successful community-campus partnerships illuminated in many studies were established by examining existing relationships to determine what works – what needs to be in place to have a successful partnership (Bringle & Hatcher, 2002; Campus-Community Partnerships for Health, 2006; Marullo & Edwards, 2000; Wolff & Maurana, 2001). However, what previous frameworks fail to determine is the motivation for partnering in the first place. Because a central question in this study is to understand why school personnel participate in academic outreach programs emanating from the university, a theoretical framework was needed to explain this rationale. What emerges through this research is that a need for resources is a guiding impetus for collaborating, particularly when it comes to college preparation services. That said, although resource dependence theory explains much of the motivation to establish and sustain interorganizational partnerships, its focus on power dynamics between partners is not as impactful on the relationships studied here as is the shared belief between organizations that access to higher education for underrepresented students must be broadened, a goal driven by social justice aims and a desire for social transformation. Therefore, I propose a modification to resource dependence theory that captures the collaborative nature of such partnerships, which I term civic interdependence.

In order to understand this interdependency, we must first be aware of the dynamics that exist when one organization is dependent upon another. Johnson (1995) defines resource dependency as follows: “The resource dependence argument suggests that a given organization will respond to and become *dependent* on those organizations or entities in its environment that control *resources* which are both critical to its operation and over which it has limited control” (p. 1). In considering such a structure, most point to Emerson’s (1962) treatise on power imbalances that can emerge when two or more organizations establish an association. For Emerson, power is a factor of one actor’s dependence on another. (This is true of individuals and organizations, which under Emerson’s description, can both be described as singular actors.) Actor A depends on actor B if his aspirations can only be achieved through appropriate actions taken by B. In such a relationship, B would be the more powerful partner. Emerson proposes dependence thusly: “(*Dab*). The dependence of actor A upon actor B is (1) directly proportional to A’s *motivational investment* in goals mediated by B, and (2) inversely proportional to the *availability* of those goals to A outside of the A-B relation” (p. 32). Correspondingly, the power of actor B over actor A (*Pba*) is defined by the resistance from A that can be overcome by B. Therefore, the power of B over A is directly attributable to A’s dependence on B. “In short, power resides implicitly in the other’s dependency” (p. 32).

In dependent relationships, power between the parties can either be balanced or unbalanced. A balanced relationship is represented: (*Pab*=*Dba*) = (*Pba*=*Dab*). An unbalanced relationship looks like this: (*Pab*=*Dba*) > (*Pba*=*Dab*). However, unbalanced relationships are unstable due to the power differentials, which in turn cause either cost reduction steps to be taken, and/or balancing operations to be put in place. Thus, because resource acquisition can be unpredictable, organizations will take action to make the stream of incoming essential resources more stable. “In an attempt to increase the certainty surrounding the flow of critical resources into the organization, reduce dysfunctional relationships of dependence shared with other organizations, and in effect increase organizational autonomy within its environment, strategic decisions are made by organizational leaders to minimize the constraints imposed by the environment” (Johnson, 1995, p. 8). These decisions will typically result in buffering or bridging activities, such as forming exchange partnerships with alternative organizations. As Johnson asserts, the environment is the independent variable in resource dependence theory. Although typically organizational behavior may be seen as strategic, the theory “suggests that such action represents a reaction to perceived and potential constraints imposed by the environment” (p. 14). Similarly, Cook, Cheshire, and Gerbasi (2006) argue that committed relationships between organizations were more likely to form under conditions of uncertainty about quality in order to reduce risk and assure profit. In the case of schools wanting to provide college counseling to their students, the uncertain environment is the funding for such services and increasing caseloads for counselors. For example, when schools partner with university outreach programs to provide college counseling services, it is done in an era of shrinking counseling budgets and an air of uncertainty about the future of college counseling in the schools.

Accordingly, the importance of the exchanges between organizations varies for the parties involved. Some are trivial, whereas others are essential. Depending on the exchange balance, the relationship between organizations can take various forms: dependent, reciprocal, or dominant (Johnson, 1995). In the case of academic outreach from higher education to secondary schools, it would appear on the surface that colleges and universities have a dominant relationship with their school partners because of the resources that they provide to the schools. However, while the schools in one of the programs detailed below are dependent upon university for the resources it provides, it is also true that the higher education institution is dependent on these schools to fulfill both its community engagement goals and its desires for a more diverse student body. This is even more of a factor with the other program studied here, as it relies on the teachers and counselors at the schools to implement programmatic activities. Therefore, it is hypothesized that rather than a one-way resource dependent relationship, the relationship between the schools and the university is one of interdependence, based on the social and educational goals they have in common.

Although both conflict and coordination can be consequences of frequent interorganizational interaction, there are factors that are more likely to produce collaboration. For instance, Hall et al. (1977) found that “personnel competence, performance, quality of communications, and compatibility of philosophy were positively related to coordination among the organizations and negatively related to conflict” (p. 466). Going further, in their study examining the interactions among organizations charged with dealing with problem youth, the authors found that the strongest prediction of coordination among organizations was the existence of a formal agreement. In essence, they found that in voluntary relationships that are formalized through some kind of an agreement (contract), domain consensus was achieved, meaning that power differentials in formal relationships have been resolved and are therefore not an important variable. Also, in situations like these, mutual recognition of good performance is important, particularly in establishing the relationship in the first place.

Therefore, in cases like this, the control of resources is not as important as meeting an outcome that both partners consider to be essential. Johnson (1995) highlights this idea in discussing organizational interdependence. As he states, because one organization rarely possesses or controls all of the various resources it needs for survival, organizations are interdependent with other organizations. “These assumptions provide an important basis for understanding and conceptualizing the nature of organizational and inter-organizational behavior and activity” (p. 4). Lundin (2007) cites exchange theory as providing a foundation for explaining cooperation, which is a consequence of resource interdependence. Like Johnson, he states that a lack of resources ultimately provides the motivation for working together. “An organization will avoid interactions with others if the benefits of cooperation do not exceed the costs since cooperation is complicated, is costly, and involves a loss of autonomy. But if organization A needs resources from organization B and organization B needs resources from organization A, there is a good chance that cooperation will take place” (p. 652).

What this says, then, is that organizations form partnerships not only out of a need for resources that others possess, but also because of shared motivations in terms of what they are trying to accomplish. This is a variation of Emerson’s ideas about the role of power in dependent relationships, as it highlights the importance of shared feelings about the partnership and the environment that affects it. Johnson (1995) points out how interdependence is different from traditional thoughts on dependent organizations: “Resource dependence theory assumes that organizational behavior and structures are shaped primarily by materialistic forces. Absent among its advocates are discussions regarding the role of rival influences and determinants, e.g., cultural, ideological and institutional factors and considerations” (p. 16). To this, I might add overall environmental conditions—for example, cases in which both parties are affected by economic conditions that increase interdependence (or a termination of the relationship altogether). Broader social-historical and policy conditions affect educational institutions, and impact not only what they do, but also how they organize to persist in achieving social transformation goals (Hurtado et. al, in press).

Consequently, resource dependence theory’s emphasis on power imbalances, and what organizations do to reduce their dependencies on other organizations, does not fully explain the relationships between schools and their university partners. What emerges in this study, on the other hand, is that while schools are dependent on universities for college preparation assistance, they view the university as having a responsibility to offer such services--that it is part of the social charge of public higher education institutions. So rather than reducing their dependency on the university, they want as much university engagement as is possible.

Similarly, the university is dependent on the schools to be able to enact these programs, which serve as a major component to the institution’s overall efforts to increase the diversity of its enrollment. Without schools to partner with, the outreach programs would be nonexistent. From a philosophical standpoint, the university seeks to be able to increase the number of schools and students it works with, or in other words, increase its dependency on the schools for prepared students. However, environmental constraints—mostly financial—preclude the university from relying on schools without intervention, while also limiting their involvement because of resource constraints.

Building on Emerson’s conception of resource dependency, I hypothesized that a shared ideology behind the partnership (beyond that of having shared goals for the program outcomes) serves as an important motivation for the relationship to develop. In the wake of strong external barriers to meeting their collective desires to increase postsecondary access for underrepresented students, personnel at both the schools and the university are in need of resources that the other partner institutions possess. But rather than engaging in efforts to decrease dependency, as is apparent in Emerson’s model, I posit that school and university partners look at collaboration as an aspect of a shared ideology.

Therefore, I proposed that what motivates both the school personnel and the university staff to partner on college preparation programs is a measure of civic interdependence, which is marked by a mutual dependence on resources that a partnering organization possesses, as well as a shared belief that the organizations should be working together to achieve social justice aims. Such a framework adds to the civic engagement literature regarding how we view a successful community-campus partnership because it examines not just *how* the most successful outcomes from the relationship can be achieved, but also *why* the institutions should collaborate at all.

**Methodology**

Two separate outreach programs at a single public research university, University of the Public (UP) were chosen to explore how program variation affects the way in which university personnel engage their local partners on the issue of access to higher education. One of the programs, University Outreach, sends trained staff members into the schools to prepare students for the college application and admissions process, as well as to provide technical assistance to the school’s college counseling staff. The other program, Science and Math Outreach, provides stipends to math and science teachers in the schools to coach students on extracurricular projects, with the intention of increasing the number of underrepresented students graduating from college with a STEM (science, technology, engineering, and mathematics) degree. Due to the fact that the primary goal of this study was to hear directly from community stakeholders about their reasons for participating in the outreach efforts, 21 counselors and teachers at partnering schools were interviewed to assess why and how they participate in these programs. In addition, 3 university program staff members were interviewed in an effort to explore the degree to which agreement exists between school and university partners. Likewise, documentation tied to the programs (service agreements, program advertising, etc.) was analyzed for the same purposes.

Analyses were first conducted by the specific case, followed by a cross-case synthesis. All analyses focused on why the community partners participate in the university’s outreach efforts, and how their participation affects their view of the institution’s commitment to a diverse student body and social responsibility. In coding the data, I followed a constant comparative methodology in which themes that emerged from all of the data (interviews and document analysis) were compared to one another, both within each case, and across the cases (Babbie, 2007).

This study presents the findings from these interviews and an analysis of the documentation connected with the programs, focusing first on why the school partners want to participate, and then moving on to why they think it is important for the university to be engaged in this work. As examined in the theoretical framework, what emerges is that whereas a dependence on resources is a driving force behind the school personnel’s decision to involve themselves in these programs, there also exists a civic interdependence based on a shared belief that access to postsecondary education needs to be expanded for underrepresented students.

Given what we know about the school partners’ motivations to work with students in the manner that they do, how does participating in either Science and Math Outreach or University Outreach contribute to their professional goals? In other words, what spurs them to collaborate with the university? Research on institutional civic engagement tells us that community partners participate in initiatives like service-learning because they want to educate college students about issues that exist within the community in order to develop the next generation of professionals who will take up the social change cause. In addition, they see colleges and universities as resource banks from which they can draw support for their work (Barrera, 2008; Bell & Carlson, 2009). However, previous research has failed to provide a theoretical framework to guide our understanding of why school partners participate in academic outreach. Thus, the findings that have surfaced in this study present an emergent model of civic interdependence that helps to explain the motivation behind the community partners’ participation in the two programs under examination here. Analyzing the responses in the aggregate, participation can be divided into four philosophical motivations that are shared by both the school partners and the program staff members: a mutual need for resources, a mutual social responsibility to address the college access gap among underrepresented students, a shared commitment to take on this challenge, and a shared desire to increase the engagement between institutions of higher education and their local schools.

## Mutual Need for Resources

### Assistance with Meeting the Daily Demands of the Job

College counselors in urban public high schools appear to have an impossible job. Faced with thousands of students to advise, they are put in a position to transmit information about the college application process to an overwhelming caseload. Although there is no one agreed upon ratio for the number of counselors to students, the research reveals that in urban public high schools, each college counselor will likely have a caseload of as little as 300 students, increasing to more than a thousand (McDonough, 2005). Furthermore, a number of the counselors interviewed for this study remarked that they are the only college counselor for their school, which has an enrollment of several thousand. Consequently, when asked why they participate in the University Outreach program, the most common response was because it helps ease the burden that has been placed upon them, even to a small extent. Beatrice Gaines[[1]](#footnote-1), a counselor at Felix High School who has participated in the program for a decade, details the need.

They're people [at the University] that can help to make sure I'm providing services to more students directly. We have a senior class with 960 kids and one of me. We have a campus this year of 5,000 -- excuse me -- 4,000-plus students. Previous to this year, we were over 5,000 students. And (there was) me for the entire campus. So anybody that can come in and is knowledgeable and interested in helping the kids and has the same kinds of goals as I do, are (sic) welcome.

Olivia Martin’s feelings about University Outreach are similar. Due to the size of the school in which she works, she welcomes the assistance of personnel coming in from local universities like UP, particularly because she views the help through the lens of a partnership.

I personally participate because there is one of me and there is -- I have a school of about 4,000 students. So any additional knowledgeable individuals that I can have working out of my office, I'm going to say ‘yes’ to. Because any additional help or resources -- I mean, I'm all about collaborating with outside resources to make sure my students' needs are being met.

What is clear from these responses and others is that the counselors are committed to getting the information about postsecondary education out to as many students as possible. When asked why her school participates in the program, Tina January pointed to this fact. “I need the help. There are 1900 kids at this school right now…But we not only work with the seniors, we work with all grade levels. It's like an extension of me -- it's more help in the office. We get more people educated about the college admissions process. It's like a total integral part of what goes on in the college center.”

In essence, what Ms. January is saying is that without a program like University Outreach, she would not be able to reach as many students, which is a strong motivation to participate in programs that can enlist the help of university staff and volunteers. “They’re indispensable,” as she puts it. Roberto Bonilla, who has participated in the program for 11 years, would agree. In fact, he says that the assistance that he receives from the program removes some of the burden he faces as the one college counselor for his school. “They're, like I said, an extension of my office. And those 90 kids that they counsel are 90 kids I don't really have to worry about all that much … It just makes my job a lot easier.”

Indeed, easing the burdens associated with college counseling is a significant attraction to partnering with the university in this way. Because of the overwhelming responsibility that these individuals face, to have a program that can support them in what they do not only provides a tangible resource, but an emotional one as well. Susan Kennedy, a counselor for ten years at Monarch High, alludes to this point.

With the outreach that I get from University of the Public, it really, really takes away some of that edge where I'm not so burnt out at the end. I don't think I would be able to affectively do my job if I did not have a resource like UP University Outreach to assist me. I'm one person with 1600 kids. I work with 600 to 800 kids very closely, but I'm able to do so because of their service and because of their continued assistance and knowledge and connection with kids.

As we see then, an attractive component to the University Outreach (UO) program is the fact that the students have the opportunity to get more individualized attention, which clearly does not happen very often in schools of this size. Because the program works with a cohort of students who have met the selection criteria for the program, it allows the site coordinators and undergraduates from UP to provide more personalized advising. Although the counselors would prefer to work in this way also, Nan Camby knows that that is just not realistic.

You know, I work in a school which up until this year has had around 3,000 students. Now, next year we're supposed to have fewer students because they're opening up a new school to help relieve the overload, but -- there is no way I could give these students the one-on-one type of assistance or even small group assistance that they get from having a (UO) representative on campus. He reads their essays when it comes time for personal statements and helps them shape them. The assistance he provides, I cannot do, because I'm trying to service the entire school.

In essence, then, the counselors know that they cannot possibly provide college advising to all the students in the school, or even all of the students who are, or should be, college bound. However, a resource like University Outreach allows them to connect with more of their students. That fact is not lost on the counselors, who are very grateful for the support the university provides in helping them reach so many more students. Rhonda Nicolls, the counselor at Valley High, sums up the feeling. “They [the counselors at the schools] work for a very large population of students. And so, to have that help is just a Godsend.”

However, they are not just appreciative because it means that some of their students will receive extra attention. What they ultimately value is the fact that that extra attention has a tangible effect on the students. Roberto Bonilla, the college counselor at Wayne High, commented on that point. “Most people say you have a lot of students apply [to college]. Well, having them [the UO coordinators] here on a weekly basis helps me tremendously, because students sometimes have questions that need to be answered right away, and when they're here it just makes it easier for them to apply.” After all, getting more students to apply to college is the goal. Therefore, if a program like University Outreach can provide a resource that aligns with their ideological motivations, the counselors are happy to take advantage of it, as Nan Camby sums up.

It's a benefit to me that they're there. And again, without them, I couldn't reach the population that they reach … My philosophy is that I want to reach as many people as possible and I want to get out the information as much as possible to people so they can make decisions about what they want to do and how they want to do it, how they want to prepare for life after high school. I could not really service every group in the way they need to be serviced with the individualized attention, being able to provide the information, answer questions, and be a support, if I had -- if I was devoting equal attention to every constituency, if you will.  So it really allows me, frees me up to deal with a larger group of people by knowing that my UO rep is able to attend to the group of people that are [competitively] eligible or are ID' d to being college bound.

Given that the counselors place such high value on what University Outreach can provide to them and their efforts to advise as many students as possible, it is understandable that they worry about the prospect of losing such a prized resource. And yet, as Henry Booker explains it, they are aware that financial support for such a program is anything but guaranteed with the declining state of public funding for higher education. When asked about losing the program to budget cuts, he replied, “I'd be very concerned, honestly. I mean again, even though we are a much smaller school, it's just me in the office, but I'm asked to be responsible for all the students on campus.” Thus, Booker knows that UO allows him to extend his reach, and knows what his school would be missing if the program did not have a presence there. “The reality is, I try to focus on our seniors, and I try to do the best I can for everybody else, starting with the 11th graders. And [UO], what they allow the college office at least in Liberty Hill to do, is reach out to the 10th graders and sometimes our 9th graders; but especially our 10th graders.” Echoing this concern, Loretta Nash wonders aloud whether the same number of underrepresented students would receive counseling at Valley High. “I see them [UO] as part of my personal support system. And I see the effectiveness of what they're doing with my students. It's just all positives for me. It's all pluses. And I worry if they weren't there, how so many students would be reached and get that guidance and support, because I know that I can't do it all.”

There are, of course, counselors who dispute that they cannot do the job without a program like University Outreach. And it is not surprising that some counselors, feeling somewhat under siege in an era of strict budgetary expenditures where the college counseling position is often not as valued as those more directly associated with teaching and administration, may be worried that if too much credit is given to the university-based program, that they may be seen as expendable. Olivia Martin, the college counselor at Jamaica High School, is one such individual. She offers a contrasting view, to some extent, of the dependence her school has on the program. Although she sees University Outreach as a resource for her students, she contends that the students still receive necessary counseling without the program. As opposed to those who say that the program is vital to them being able to do their job, this counselor merely sees them as supplementary. “But the majority of the students come directly to me. They're [UO] just an additional resource for our students.”

However, this appears to be a minority opinion. Most of the counselors interviewed spoke about University Outreach in terms of it being a necessity for them to be able to do their job the way that they want, and in the way that it needs to be done. “I realize the benefit of having as many of these kinds of resources as possible, especially when you're dealing with huge numbers of students. It's impossible to be one person and do an effective job anyhow,” says Nan Camby. “With these kinds of numbers, if I didn't have a program like University Outreach, I would be servicing far fewer students.”

The University Outreach staff at UP shares these concerns over the need for counseling services that exists in the schools. Because their mission is to increase the number of underrepresented students in higher education, they too do not want to see college counseling fall by the wayside. If that happens, they know that these students will not receive the information they need to navigate the college application process. And perhaps even more alarming, it is likely that without an advocate for postsecondary attendance at the school, a number of these students will not even consider college as a possibility. Hence, they are aware of what their program provides, as shown by UO director Bernice Lantz. “Now that the college counselor position is becoming an obsolete position, even though some schools, they assign it to several people, I don't know if they really take on that responsibility. So we support them in that college prep job category. We provide a support that may be declining in many of the schools.” Gerardo Ignacio agrees, reaffirming the feeling expressed by many of the counselors as to why they participate in this program from University of the Public. “I think for me it's very clear: Not enough counselors. And there is a humongous need. If we were not there, I think they would be extremely overwhelmed. In my opinion, that's the best reason.”

Beyond the fact that a college preparation program like University Outreach can extend the counseling that goes on at the school, these programs are valued for the quality of the resources that they provide. The program staff are not only trained experts in college admissions, but perhaps more importantly for the counselors in the school, they are knowledgeable about any recent changes that have been made to admissions practices and policies, particularly as those relate to the statewide public system of higher education. In fact, it is this level of aptitude that separates UO from other programs. Susan Kennedy says the program is of great help to her “because they're so knowledgeable and so competent.” Highlighting their quality, she goes on to add, “There are some people who have offered their services, but they can't come on my campus because they're giving out information that's not accurate.”

The reason why their knowledge of the college admissions process is so highly valued is because the counselors see the effect it has on the students. Of special interest is the fact that the UO staff share the desires of the counselors in establishing a college-going culture among their students. In particular, they are appreciative of the fact that the program helps not just those who would be going to college anyway, but in addition, helps those who may not have thought about college before, or who do not know what it takes to get there. Andrea McMichael, the counselor at Dillon High, explains it this way: “That's where [UO] is a Godsend, because those folks are able – and [Christina, one of the UO coordinators] has done it quite well – to help with my 2.3-2.4 [GPA] kids who really want to make it in the 9th grade. Let's try to get them [to progress toward getting] into AP classes and tell them the meaning of getting these classes and doing well with success above and beyond high school.”

As a result, if the program’s funding were to be cut to the point that it could no longer operate in the schools, the counselors suggest that that would leave a rather large void. And as usual, the ones to suffer the most would be those students who, unfortunately, are accustomed to going without, says Henry Booker.

The school would truly miss their presence for the younger kids, because that's when they first get exposed to their presence on campus. I think nowadays most kids -- I shouldn't say most kids -- some kids have a little more understanding of [the college admissions] requirements, simply because they correspond to the high school graduation requirements. But still, you can't hear it enough if they're first-generation, low-income 10th grade students in our school.

However, for Booker and others, they know that the state of funding for education makes the elimination of programs like UO a potential reality that they may have to face. “But to answer your question, their presence would be extremely missed, and I would not like to think about that actually happening, even though I should come to the realization that it might actually be that way.”

The motivations for the teachers and counselors who participate in Science and Math Outreach are somewhat different from those who work with University Outreach. Because this program is established as a way to increase student interest in the STEM fields by getting them to participate in math and engineering competitions in which they participate in activities such as model bridge building, there is not a sense of feeling overwhelmed by the task at hand. Rather, they see SMO as a way to help teach their subject matter in a manner that extends beyond the classroom, which according to the statewide program, is an intended outcome. As advertising material for SMO states, students in the program are to follow curriculum that “reinforce state math and science content standards.” Accordingly, a major attraction for those in the schools is having the opportunity to teach the theoretical concepts of their disciplines in a hands-on approach that often makes the material more comprehensible for their students.

Reflecting on how the SMO projects impact the learning in the classroom, Enrique Laner, a math teacher at City High, says that connection is something he takes into consideration both as a teacher and as a SMO project coordinator. “Whatever I do in the classroom, I’m always thinking about, ‘How is this going to help them do this project better, or how is this project going to enhance their learning in the classroom?’ So, there’s a back and forth thing going on between the [program] and the classes.” Ernesto Volpez, who last year completed his first year as a SMO coordinator, expressed a similar sentiment. “Well, I think SMO makes you think about what you teach in a different way. Again, you start thinking outside of the classroom.” Building on the applied aspect of the program, Volpez has enjoyed approaching his math classes from a different perspective. “I think that program is a little bit exciting for me because I have a chance to explain to the kids and talk to the kids about the things that they can do besides quizzes and tests or whatever the case may be.”

Consequently, it is this aspect of reaching students who may not normally be interested in math and science that is most intriguing about the Science and Math Outreach program. At a school like City High that has a population of students that is made up primarily of students of color, opportunities like SMO are not common. So to have a way of getting students together outside of the classroom for a scholarly purpose is a nice change. “I would have to admit that it’s one of the few clubs that is academic oriented. So it’s not just social activities, but it’s actually a lot of academic,” says Victoria Lowe. “Whether they recognize it or not, they’re learning a lot of concepts that they wouldn’t probably grasp from theory only.” That speaks to the philosophical motivation behind participating in SMO. As opposed to receiving help to be able to do their job in a more complete fashion, like the counselors who collaborate with University Outreach, this program allows teachers and counselors to consider how they might do their job differently. “Because, you know, I'm a math teacher, and I love math and I wanted these kids to see that there didn't have to be just the formulas in the text book -- it has more to it than that,” remarked Ernesto Volpez. “So getting them to use their hands and think outside of the classroom and outside the box and building things and getting more hands-on was something I was excited about.”

**Mutual Responsibility to Increase Access for Underrepresented Students**

All of the reasons for participating in an outreach program outlined above are factors of limited resources within the schools. If provided with enough time, money, and manpower, it is likely that those in the schools could provide for their students without the aid of a higher education partner. However, there is one repeatedly mentioned resource that cannot be duplicated by the school personnel: the prestige that accompanies a university-based program. The school partners believe that fact mandates the involvement of higher education in these efforts, because for the students these counselors and teachers are trying to reach, as Randy Vale notes, it makes a big difference.

Obviously the more times the students hear the same thing, the better. Because I can say it 10 times, and they may not retain it. But when the representative from UP, being the person with the clout…because they come from the university--they're currently the ones that read the application. They can give you an actual university perspective. Even if I say it 10 times, them saying it one time is more effective. So just having the, I guess, the cachet of saying that you're from University of the Public, and you provide this resource to this school because you see this school as having the potential students that can be visible to our university, with our help, possibly. That definitely helps hammer home the idea that what we're doing is beneficial to them.

This “cachet” that comes with the university not only carries more influence with the students, but it is an important element when it comes time to discuss the application process with parents. “They're very valuable because a lot of students, they hear my voice a lot,” remarked Roberto Bonilla. “But sometimes -- and even parents -- when they hear it from a UP rep or UP person, it just has more weight and they listen more carefully, verses -- they'll listen to me, but I think sometimes we need that -- ‘here is the expert from UP telling us the stuff that you need to do, so do it because that's what has to be done.’” Sandra Sanchez, a counselor at Bayside High, concurs.

They also help us out with all of our parent or family nights. Again, with the same topic, financial aid, college admissions. We've found that parents and students tend to be more -- they take in the information better from the professionals, the representatives, than they do from us. So in that aspect, when we bring somebody in from UP, who has the title of UP, who is reading the applications from UP…they are more receptive to them as they are to us.

The staff from University Outreach recognizes this fact, and understands what it means for the students they work with at the schools. As Ingrid Rodriguez, a site coordinator for UO pointed out, this is an important reason for the collaboration between the partnering institutions. “The connection that we have, that we create between the school and the university—I think that's a big thing too. I mean, a lot of stuff they can say themselves, but if somebody from UP or somebody from the university says it, it means different things to the students.” Furthermore, she emphasizes that the students view the university’s engagement with the school as significant.

And I've seen that with students: "Oh, we have UP here." They'll announce it, "Oh, we have a representative from UP." That makes a big difference. Like oh, they're outreaching to us? You know, just mentally, it's like, "Oh!" Same thing happens with the recruiters from the different big league schools. Somebody from Harvard comes to your school; that's a big deal. I mean UP is up there as well. So I think it's a big part.

The attachment to a university with the name value of University of the Public also emerges as an important factor for those who participate in Science and Math Outreach. For the teachers and counselors who need to recruit students to participate in the SMO activities, it is a benefit to be able to say where the program is coming from. “And, of course, the name UP--it’s a big attractor for the kids too….I think that’s a huge magnet to the program because it is attached to a top university,” relayed Victoria Lowe.

The prestige of these programs is not lost on the school partners either. For teachers who serve as SMO coordinators at their respective schools, they know what it means to be a part of a larger effort. “I really like that it’s state-backed. It’s not just a little high school initiative that nobody knows about. To me, there’s power in that. And I hadn’t really realized that until I got into it….I wouldn’t want to start a little science club that nobody knew about. I want to be part of a national movement.” This sentiment by Robert Whitaker, a teacher at Pacific Point High School, demonstrates what it means for both him and the school to be involved with such an initiative. As Ines LaPierre, a teacher at Flower High, said, “It's good for the school. It looks good that we participate in that kind of thing.” Perhaps Susan Kennedy, a counselor at Monarch High School who participates in University Outreach sums it up best: “Just the fact that they're coming from University of the Public, that's going to make everyone want to be a part of it.”

Thus, the school partners’ motivations for participating in these college preparation programs vary. But the common element among all the reasons is that the programs provide resources that are largely void in the schools. Whereas these services may be viewed by some as not being essential to the purposes of the schools, it is clear from the statements above that they align with the philosophical beliefs held by the partners about what a school should offer its students. For those interviewed, these programs do not just add a supplementary value to the students’ high school experience. Rather, they fill a need.

However, it is also true that the school partners do not feel as though there exists a one-way dependence, where the university does not benefit from the association. On the contrary, the counselors and teachers interviewed see the programs as collaborations in which reciprocal benefits, and thus mutual dependencies, exist. As Sandra Sanchez asserted, “We could easily go to [a local private university] who has a lot more money, and they're much more resourceful, but that's where everybody is going.” The importance of this comment cannot be understated. It is evident that those involved in the partnership believe that the university, as a public institution, has a responsibility to be doing this work. Consequently, the university would be at a loss if not for the participation of those in the schools. If those tasked with educating students at all stages are going to do something about increasing access for underrepresented students, then power differentials between the program staff and their school partners must not be evident, despite the prestige with which the university is viewed within the community. What is demonstrated in the two cases studied here, is that the relationship between the parties is one not based on the struggle for influence. Instead, it is based on a shared philosophy that the achievement gap must be closed.

### Increasing Access as a Measure of the University’s Social Responsibility

The desire to increase the number of underrepresented students applying to and gaining admission to college is one that the school partners typically say comes from their own experiences. Many of the counselors and teachers interviewed were also underrepresented students, and like those who got into their chosen profession due to either having a positive or negative experience with their college counselors when they were students, a number of the teachers and counselors who participate in these two programs do so because of what they went through as teenagers. Enrique Laner, a teacher who serves as a Science and Math Outreach coordinator at City High, explains how he sees himself in his students.

Because I’m much like them. I come from a similar background, and I went into a technical major, and I know how difficult it was for me as a Physics major and not having the necessary tools to survive in things such as Physics … Even having that warning would have been great so that I would of known that I needed to have a greater level of dedication. I’m just trying to go ahead and get the information out there to those students that will need it when they go into those majors.

Tina January, who has partnered with University Outreach for 17 years, expressed that her dedication to this work came out of her own experience in thinking about college. Like many of her students, she was uninformed about the process as a high school student. Therefore, she knows how confusing it can be, and that is why she wants to do something about it.

Like for me, I grew up in a family where I knew I was going to go college. [But] I did not have a college counselor. I did not know when I graduated 4th of my class in a very small high school in Northern California that with my GPA, my rank, and my SAT score, I could have gotten a full ride to USC, which is what I wanted to do since my mother went there. My best friend went to a high school that had a college counselor, and [even though she] had lower grades than me and a lower position in her class -- got a full ride to USC. And I'm sitting there going, “This is one of the reasons that I do this.” I want to provide those opportunities to people who don't have them. That's all.

For other school partners, the commitment to close the educational achievement gap has come from their experiences working in the schools. They have seen first-hand how difficult it is for some students to make it to college, and rather than accept that things just have to be that way, have decided to try to correct the problem. “During undergrad I was an intern at [a local high school, working for a nonprofit organization that encourages postsecondary attendance among first-generation college-goers],” recalled Sandra Sanchez. “I ended up working for them, and I ended up really enjoying the advising aspect of it. And as I went into my Master's program, I learned about the deficiencies within the underrepresented groups with regards to college access. But that helped me -- that ignited my passion for changing those numbers, and I'm still on my path.”

Hence, involvement in outreach programs is seen as a way to improve the educational outcomes that they hope to see for their students. That may be one reason why one-third of the informants have participated in other outreach programs, outside of University Outreach or Science and Math Outreach. They see a significant value coming from partnering with local institutions of higher education, and as the previous section noted, they can certainly use the help. They appreciate that a university like UP is willing to work with their school districts to provide assistance in reaching their goals. But beyond that, what has come to light in this study is that these school partners believe that the university actually has a responsibility to increase access to higher education for their students.

I have a Hispanic student, in particular. Smart kid. Not a citizen. Mother has helped him, dad is gone. No money, mama lost her job. Kid is still smart. But the kid has become more and more depressed. By the end of 11th grade, the kid -- it's dawning on him. "I'm not a citizen, what am I going to do?" "What the heck do I do now?" He's already started smoking a little bit of marijuana. In our meetings -- they're very impactful for counselors--we learn a lot from our therapist. The boy has started using methamphetamines to self-medicate because he's become depressed. We need someone on campus that can help him. He's smart. The boy took all AP classes, and I noticed he got really good in 9th and 10th grade, began to slip in second semester, 11th grade. By 12th grade, he's still trying to hang on, but you can see what's happening in his family, demonstrating itself and expressing itself in huge, huge ways in his family. I was absolutely broken hearted. What can you do?

I think it's the responsibility of UP to make sure they're taking a good look and giving these kids who may be marginal somewhat [a chance]. You know, let's say you want a 2200 on the SAT. I would give an African American or a Hispanic kid who got an 1850 -- I'd give them a chance. Because that kid has been disadvantaged so much. They simply cannot keep up with kids who have gone to private schools on the East Coast, been tutored all through life by the best. Our Blacks and our Browns coming out of public schools cannot keep up with them. And it is the responsibility of University of the Public to try to help them, mentor them on our campuses, tutor them on our campuses, and you will get a few more of them entering, whether it's Black or Brown.

This statement by Andrea McMichael, in many ways, sums up how the school partners feel about the responsibility of higher education institutions to address the achievement gap. They do not see it as a problem that exists solely within the K-12 system. On the contrary, they view postsecondary institutions as having as important a role in solving this problem as their primary and secondary level counterparts. The idea that colleges and universities should exist as the ivory tower simply does not play well in schools where it is a daily struggle to provide even a satisfactory education for their students. As noted above, trying to be everything to every student is an impossibility for these schools. So they need the help that these institutions can provide. But that also means that they want the universities to be more attentive to this issue. “I truly think that higher education needs to be more accessible to students, especially the students that come from these communities. And where, you know, they're not represented. I'm an example of that,” says Esther Salinas. “I went to UP. I was accepted to the program that they had back then which was the -- I don't really remember -- it was some form of affirmative action program that they had. Otherwise I would have never had a chance to go there. So if we don't provide the students with that support then they will not be able to attend those schools.”

It is in discussing the school partners’ beliefs about the role of higher education in addressing the access gap where the interdependence of these organizations is most evident. While the schools know that they are responsible for preparing their students for a higher level of education, they also are confident that postsecondary institutions have a mandate to help in this effort. This is especially true for a public school like UP, as Linda Franklin, the counselor at Riley High School asserts. “Gosh, as it functions as an arm of the government because it is a state-run school, I do think so, yes, because it is a state-run school. We pay tax dollars, and this is a community in our state. This is a subpopulation of our state.” Or, as Roberto Bonilla commented, “I think they're aware that they have an obligation to make it accessible to the residents of [the state].” Beatrice Gaines concurs, stressing that this directive comes from on high. “If the legislature made a mandate to the [statewide] system to be broad and open and service a certain percentage of kids, based on that broad and open boundary, somebody's got to reach out to the kids or they won't know how to get there. And you'll only end up with those who know how to do it on their own.” In essence, what they are saying is that these institutions are *mandated* to be working with the schools to improve the chances for underrepresented students. And if the universities are going to do that through programs like University Outreach, say the counselors, they need the schools’ collaboration.

In addition, the university itself has much to gain from assisting in the effort to better prepare underrepresented students. A number of the counselors who participate in University Outreach noted that UP has publicly stated diversity goals for its campus which say that the university should be reflective of the multiplicity of the surrounding population. Of course, what that means more than anything else is that it should have a student enrollment that encompasses a variety of racial, ethnic, gender, religious, and income backgrounds. In order to reach these goals, then, the institution cannot restrict its focus to only that which happens on campus. As Monarch High School college counselor Susan Kennedy observed, the only way for UP to remain as a prestigious *and* a diverse institution, it needs to engage the local community.

Because it is a public institution. It is, for us, our Stanford of public schools. So you know, if you want to claim that you want to be culturally diverse and educationally diverse, then you're going to have to extend yourself, especially in areas that don't automatically get that information. Affluent areas, parents have the money. Whatever the schools don't provide, they have the money to get it independently. And the majority of the schools in [the state] are not private, they're public. That's who services the majority of the students in [the state]. So keeping that in mind, if you want a diverse population, you're going to have to go into some of those areas that don't normally have the information readily accessible.

In a similar vein, Randy Vale, the counselor at Vista Verde High and a University of the Public alum, says that if the university is going to publicize its advancements in the number of underrepresented students admitted, it needs to do something about making these students eligible in the first place.

I feel they have the responsibility to do it because if we're tabbing numbers and we're tabbing the students that we do receive from [the diversity initiatives], then we have a responsibility to assure that we have a pipeline of students to be able to do that with, right? If we're happy about reaching diversity, we have a responsibility to put programs in place to be able to do such a thing.

Furthermore, what the counselors see as a real strength of the University Outreach program is the fact that it is not a recruiting tool for UP. And because of that, the program staff is diligent about providing information about the various systems of higher education: public and private four-year institutions, as well as community colleges. Perhaps for that reason, the counselors see the program as not only being responsible for working with those students who may be eligible to apply to UP, but also for helping those students who may have a better chance of getting into a different institution, as viewed by Loretta Nash.

As a public university, I believe they have that responsibility, just as I believe that [a different institution] does as a public university. And not for them, necessarily, to be self-interested, in terms of getting kids into their own university. But they're the local representative of the [statewide] system, and so for that I think they do have a responsibility to help kids towards the [statewide system]. If it happens that they end up at UP, so much the better. But there are kids that would not have made it to UP or to any other [schools in the system] had they not had this kind of help. So absolutely, because they're a public education system.

And although Olivia Martin, the counselor at Jamaica High, does not necessarily agree that the university has a responsibility to engage in academic preparation at the K-12 level, she does understand the scholastic benefits for the university that come from a program like University Outreach. “So if they grab them at a high school level, when they get them as college students, you just have this group that's a little more well-informed than the student that wasn't able to work with a UO rep.” Put more succinctly, the feelings of the counselors about the university’s responsibility to provide these services can be summed up by a comment made by South High School college advisor Nan Camby: “Well, if they don't, who's going to do it?”

Not surprisingly given the shared ideology regarding the need for more services for students in these high schools, the UO staff at University of the Public agree that they have an obligation to do this, particularly as a public university. But as Ingrid Rodriguez claims, as an urban institution, the responsibility is most closely felt at home.

To a certain extent yeah, because, I mean, it's in the city. It's a big university, it's well known for being [at] the forefront of a lot of things, [like] science and everything. To see a university that's in a city that might not have its own residents going to school, it's like why aren't they doing the same thing that they're doing with the rest of the world with science and everything in their own community? So I think so, and I think it makes the university look better as well because they're affecting their community, and if they make the community better, then it makes the school better.

The school partners who work with Science and Math Outreach have a similar view of the university’s responsibility to reach out to those beyond the campus. Ernesto Volpez, a math teacher at Vista Verde High and a University of the Public graduate, understands this responsibility as a factor of the institution’s efforts to enroll a more diverse student body. “I guess, I would kind of say ‘yes’. One because it's a [campus in the statewide system]. If it was a private school, then they're obviously run differently. I would kind of say ‘yes’, because I would like for UP to remain diverse and, you know, top of the nation in education and things like that. I would hope that that would be the case.” Enrique Laner, a SMO coordinator at City High School, feels a little more adamantly that the university should be engaging the schools in this way.

I feel that it’s the moral thing to do to make sure that everything around you - we are interdependent and they should help out the community and they should make sure that everybody in the community has equal access. They should be ready to go to college and they should get them ready to go to college and make sure they have those programs out there. No, they don’t have to because, I mean, let’s face it, they get more applicants than they ever need … It’s just way above the averages around the area. So they don’t need to. However, I think they should.

Irene Williams, a counselor at Pacific Point High School who works with students in the SMO program, is also unequivocal in her feelings about UP’s duty to its local schools. “Sure. That’s why they are in the job that they are in. You’re there to serve. You’re a public university, right? And, you’re there to serve the public. Bottom line. And, to build leaders and to give everyone an opportunity to do something with their lives.”

## Shared Commitment to Address the Educational Achievement Gap

If University of the Public has a responsibility to engage its local schools in this way, then the next question to ask is: how well is it meeting this duty? In examining the way in which the statewide program is described on its website, it is clear that the university’s mission for UO is to supplement a system-wide effort to see more underrepresented students obtaining college degrees. As it says, University Outreach was established “to expand postsecondary education opportunities for [the state’s] educationally disadvantaged students.” As such, it contributes to an overall effort by the university to reduce the educational achievement gap and improve the chances that first-generation, low-income, and English-language learners will be prepared to enter postsecondary education, as well as the pursuit of postgraduate degrees. Hence, as explained in the UO service agreement, the program “seeks to partner with targeted high schools” to achieve their goals. All of this is pointed toward these students finding success in the workplace after the completion of their college careers.

Reflecting the commitment of the University Outreach program at UP to expand opportunities for their targeted students, the program staff members make themselves accessible to all the students at their partnering schools, and not just those who have been chosen to participate in specific program activities. In essence, they are there to provide assistance to any student in the school seeking college advising, given they have the time. The staff believes that that is one characteristic that makes their program different. Consequently, they include this element in their service agreement text. “We are there to be a support to the school and not ‘exclusively’ for [UO] students but any student, parent or school personnel seeking college prep information. College prep presentations in large assemblies by grade level are encouraged.”

The university’s stated commitment to their goals is an indication of their dependence on the schools to carry out this task. Under Emerson’s conception of resource dependency, this would place the schools in a position of power over the university, for if the schools chose not to participate, UP would not be able to meet their outreach responsibilities. But the school partners share the university’s desires to expand opportunities for their students, and therefore, as a result of their interdependence, are generally pleased with UP’s commitment to this cause. Esther Salinas observed that without UO, many of the students at Hewson High would not have as much of an opportunity to gain admission to a four-year university. Similarly, Andrea McMichael appreciates that the program is not overly limited in terms of who can receive services. “I like the fact that they do not only want the 3.5 [GPA] and above -- give me a break. Those kids going to be on target someplace anyhow.”

In particular, the college counselors view a program like UO as a dedication on the part of the university to increase the diversity on campus in order to more properly reflect in their student body the demographic spread of the state. That is why a program like this, which helps better prepare underrepresented students to be competitively eligible for admission to a four-year university, is so important. Through their partnership, the school personnel believe that UP is committed to meeting these diversity outcomes, as Nan Camby demonstrates.

I think they have a commitment to making sure that the university reflects the community, and I think that's a statewide commitment, if I understand it correctly….And the university being a public university, I think has made that commitment in terms of providing a program like UO system wide, so that the university does reflect the diversity of its state—the diversity of its particular community. And [to] create responsible, educated people who will then make this society, make this economy more enriched.

Randy Vale, the college counselor at Vista Verde High, agrees with Ms. Camby, stating that outreach programs not only demonstrate that the university wants a more diverse enrollment, but that it is willing to take steps to develop it.

Making sure that students are well-polished and competitive applicants is the way that I think the UO program is addressing diversity on campus. It's one thing to tell them how to do it, but if you're not working with them and making sure they're understanding and they're doing it on the front end, then on the back end [the university is] not going to reach diversity. So I think they're doing the front approach in reaching them when they're younger, and showing them the road, and walking with them that path to insure it. So I think that's a huge thing that UO does and I think that's a compliment to [University of the Public] itself and being steadfast on their desire to have a diverse program.

Furthermore, Mr. Vale, who is a graduate of University of the Public and formerly worked for University Outreach, sees a different level of commitment to underrepresented students on the part of UP from that of other local institutions of higher education. In discussing this difference, he relayed a story from when he was a UO site coordinator.

I was in Vernon High School when I worked for UO, and I was wearing a UO t-shirt that had University of the Public on it. I was working a block from Omaha Street, and I had a mechanic who yelled out to me, "Hey, this is [Private U] country." And I turned around to him and said, "I went to UP, I worked for UP, and I'm back in our community trying to get our students to come to UP. Have you seen someone wearing a [Private U] sweatshirt doing the same work?" And he had nothing to say. Because we have so many people who are just stuck on the athletics and stuck on other things, they don't see the impact. They don't see what schools are doing to benefit their communities directly. I think that programs like University Outreach and [other outreach programs] and all these other programs that are out in the community, trying to get our kids interested in attending a [prestigious university], are doing such a great thing that some communities -- you have to be there for them to get it. Otherwise, if they're not there, they're automatically going to assume the worst of you….UP has a serious invested interest in increasing diversity on campus, at least in my perspective, versus [Private U)] who will do things--they'll provide lip service or they'll provide camera time to show what they're doing, when ultimately that program is not really doing anything significant.

Tina January, the counselor at Hemmings High, similarly sees a commitment to the type of student who does not possess the textbook profile for a student at an academically prestigious university. “My kids have more life experience than a lot of the affluent kids do,” she suggests, adding that that should be taken into account when it comes time to consider them for admissions. “I mean the street smarts from my kids are amazing, and the resiliency--and it's something that I hope UP recognizes that, and knows that when you nurture and expose kids to something that's out there and it's available for everybody, that they need to know that it's out there and available to everybody. And thank God UP recognizes that.” Hence, most of the counselors agree with Susan Kennedy that the university is doing what it should given the fact that personnel on campus have publicly expressed a commitment for the university to become more diverse.

So if you're going to claim one thing, you got to be able to back it up. They're claiming it, and they're backing it up. If they didn't care about being culturally diverse, if that was not one of their goals, if they didn't have their [leadership], old or new, saying this isn't what they want and it wasn't the philosophy of the school, then it would be okay. But that's not what they say. If you're going to be true to your philosophy, then you have to provide some kind of access for them.

The university’s commitment to increasing access for students who may struggle to get into college is also a common sentiment among those who partner with the Science and Math Outreach program. For Victoria Lowe, she sees the fact that students have been welcomed on campus during field trips associated with the program as a measure of that commitment. To Ines LaPierre, a teacher at Flower High, that dedication is obvious given the fact that the university sponsors a program like SMO. “Well, I mean the program is supposed to be for underrepresented students, you know, to expose them to science, so I guess, if they -- I mean -- I don't know why they would request that type of student if that wasn't who they were looking to help.” Ernesto Volpez, an alumnus of University of the Public agrees when asked if the university is devoted to this cause, although he understands that with the current state of the economy, providing access to students is a complicated issue.

I would say yes. And that’s only because when I went there, and [was], I guess, considered underrepresented. It's just back to the whole economy situation. Is there going to be scholarships available or grants available or loans available? That's another thing. I've had several of my students apply to UP, some of them get in and some of them don't. It's hard to say, but I think UP does a good job of outreach and going to communities and the inner cities and these underrepresented communities and try to get the message out and get kids to apply and hopefully get accepted.

Not surprisingly, the issue of funding cuts to the outreach programs is one that emerges repeatedly. The school partners understand that the programs have faced budgetary rollbacks in recent years and now must operate in a different fashion. But rather than sully their view of the institution’s commitment to providing support to the schools, it has made them more appreciative that the university would continue to do what they can to help improve the chances of their students. Rhonda Nicolls, the counselor at Valley High, says that is reflective of the institution’s social responsibility. Nan Camby agrees. “I really commend them because this has been a tough time for them, I know, with all the cuts. And they've all hung in there and I think that really speaks to me about their level of commitment and their desire to continue this program and really make it something valid and relevant for all of us.” To further support her view of the situation, she went on to use an analogy from the Ed Sullivan show.

He had that variety show. I always remember one of the acts that he had on periodically was this guy who used to twirl ten plates at a time. And I think that the university has a lot of plates in the air, if you will. But I have never doubted the commitment or the priority of that program to educate or service underrepresented students whatsoever. Now the other plates might be dealing with raising fees and admitting more out of state students or whatever it is they're doing. And our numbers might have gone down as far as students being admitted to UP. However, we have more students being admitted to other [system-wide] campuses, and I do believe it's a direct result of their work on our campus.

In some ways, this dedication on the part of the university in the face of reduced resources has made the school partners loyal toward their university counterparts. Therefore, they want to stand up for what UP has meant for them and the students that they work with, as evidenced by Randy Vale.

When you first called me, I was pretty skeptical of what your perspective was of the program, because due to cuts, you can tell the state perspective is [that the program is] nonessential. But from the school site perspective and from the alumni perspective and from the UP student perspective, it is definitely essential. I was just at African American alumni graduation this past Saturday or Sunday. Two of my students from that freshman class were walking across that stage [at] UP….So I'm saying there's programs, though it may not be a huge benefit, a huge help, every bit helps, and you're seeing a return on your investment.

Susan Kennedy agrees, making the point that having University Outreach, even in a reduced capacity, is still better than not having it at all.

I think University of the Public is dedicated, despite what you hear in the media and despite the numbers of people of color not being admitted. I think UP is dedicated to providing services in areas that normally would not get the information. I think they still realize the awesome task that the schools have in preparing students and just getting those resources and knowing what they need to do to get into college. And they have dedicated themselves for it.

It must be pointed out, however, that a minority of the school partners interviewed questioned the level of commitment to increasing access for underrepresented students on the part of the university. Some wondered aloud whether outreach programs were little more than public relations, while others concluded that although UP sponsored programs to provide assistance to their local schools, that was not a top priority for the institution. This seemed especially true for those who work with the SMO program. For example, Enrique Laner, a graduate of UP, believes that the focus on campus is primarily concentrated on the culture of academia.

I think there are programs at UP that are geared towards [community engagement], but I don’t think that that’s the main drive and goal of the university. I think the main drive and goal of the university is research and trying to get as many researchers pumping out papers and getting published and getting funding for the university. However, they do feel a sense of responsibility, but it’s not –I think it’s more like 20% committed to helping out the community versus 80% making sure that they are taking care of their research or getting money for the school.

Others look at the student population at the university and observe that it is lacking in the kind of diversity that these programs are trying to encourage. And although the general feeling is that the university is moving in the direction of becoming more diverse, there is still work to be done. “They are working on it. It’s been a challenge,” says Irene Williams, a counselor at Pacific Point High who serves as a college advisor for SMO. “Last October I was on a fieldtrip there through [another program]. And it was called the People of Color Tour, which I found to be kind of offensive….I kind of got that tour and then I met only ten African-American males that were admitted to UP purely on academics. Tons of athletes, but…” Robert Whitaker agrees with Ms. Williams, saying that SMO could better serve as a resource in this challenge. “Well, I feel like they’re making steps. But, it seems like there’s more work to be done. I feel like [SMO] could even be more.” However, he understands this dilemma as not solely being the responsibility of the university. “I can’t just put it on other people. It’s on my shoulders. Like, I didn’t know about [SMO] before I got into the program. I’m sure [UP] does other things. I’d like to know what they are—at the high school level.”

Similarly, there are counselors who work with University Outreach who question the university’s commitment to enhancing opportunities for underrepresented students. Olivia Martin, the counselor at Jamaica High School, says that she can only really speak for the UO program, which she believes is doing a good job to better prepare students for college. However, for her, that does not necessarily mean that the university as a whole has this commitment. Andrea McMichael supports this view, saying that outreach programs and other measures to help underrepresented students create a public image that the university is dedicated to closing the achievement gap. But that does not necessarily mean that they really are.

I think they want the world to recognize that they are trying to help the lower scoring schools, the socioeconomic disadvantaged group. I think it would look bad for UP just to be pulling in kids from all over the world who can write checks, pulling in kids from the other group who can pay their top dollar. I think they want to look good.

Although some counselors question the level of commitment by UP, most also understand that admissions is a complicated issue, and one for which there are no black-and-white answers. Because they have gained so much support through outreach programs emanating from the university, they do not think the institution is turning a blind eye toward the achievement gap. But that also does not mean that University of the Public is necessarily doing everything it can, as exemplified by this statement from Sandra Sanchez, a counselor at Bayside High School.

I want to think it is, and I definitely -- part of me says yes, that's why they are continuously funding UO -- but when I see the factors or the students who have been admitted, it's conflicting. Most of the students that got into University of the Public from [Bayside], I think they all had a 3.8 [GPA], and weighted. Which is completely understandable. They are very selective -- it is one of the top ranking schools. I understand that. But how do we close that gap or how do we prepare the least resourceful students for UP admissions and completion? I think the beginnings are there….I know they're trying. Could they try harder? Probably. Most likely.

Interestingly, the staff of University Outreach also has mixed feelings regarding the commitment question. They know that they, as the personnel implementing the program and providing the counseling services at the schools, are dedicated to providing opportunities for students to advance onto postsecondary education. However, because they have seen their budget reduced nearly 60% in the last five years, they wonder to what extent the university is behind them. “It's one of the things that I feel that they have to do. But in terms of commitment and what level? [The university leadership] is committed to having the program, but what level of the program are you committed to having?” observed Gerardo Ignacio. “That's something that would have to be discussed, because having a program that doesn't function fully, then you would have to have it just as a piece. So that's -- that would be complicated.” Bernice Lantz, the UO director at University of the Public, also wondered aloud about how much of a priority academic outreach is for the university. Although optimistic, she is clearly unsure.

Well, I would like to think that we are a priority and that the university looks at this area as a priority and puts some research as well as resources behind it to make sure that this program can continue and expand and not just survive, but thrive, you know. I'm hoping and I'm thinking that it is a priority of the university and the leadership. I think we're just one piece of the solution in the community as well as; you know, researchers and other folks doing things to help out. So we're a piece of the puzzle.

That said, the fact that University Outreach continues to receive some funding, and the fact that every campus in the statewide system continues to staff their own version of UO, demonstrates to those who work for the program that the university wants to increase the number of underrepresented students matriculating in higher education. For Bernice Lantz, she points to what the mission of the program was in her early years there as a guide for why she feels this way. “So the mission of early outreach at that time was to provide the information for students so they would know early enough what the requirements were so they could be eligible for the university. Because they were not getting a lot of these students enrolling or applying because they were not eligible.” She says that the program was created, and continues to operate, because it aligns with what the university is trying to do in general with respect to its local neighborhoods. “First of all, I like to think, and I know it is, it's a part of their [the university’s] mission: Public service. [UP] has an invested interest in supporting communities, providing them information and making sure that the [student] population is representative of the community as well. I'd like to think that we're also helping to keep the campus diversified.”

The program staff maintains that their feelings about the university’s commitment are also shared by those they work with in the schools. They suggest that the trust that they have developed is partially a result of the fact that they have such an important presence at the schools. “I think it's one thing to say, yeah we're all for social justice, and not doing something about it. [But] then actually setting aside money and staff and sending out people to the community--I think it's a big thing,” says Ingrid Rodriguez. “There's a lot of programs where they bring students to the university or they bring students to participate in camps, and stuff like that. But actually seeing us there, I think is a big thing.” Gerardo Ignacio concurs, asserting that UP actually needs to do *more* in the way of promoting itself as a resource for its surrounding communities.

I think the university is involved in the community more than the people realize. I mean, it's one of those things. I think until you see a map of where we're at, you don't realize the impact that the university has on the surrounding community. I think the university wants to continue that, with that tradition. And actually this [university president], that's one of the main things that he's pushing. That's why you see banners go up in different schools. We've been partners for years, but it hasn't been formerly done the way it's been done this year. So a lot of our schools are hanging banners in front of their schools, and it's a good thing, because, again, a lot of people don't realize that UP was there 20 years ago or 10 years ago, but [Private University] will be there a couple of times and it's recognized because maybe it was in the newspaper, they provided a banner or they did something ahead of us. And I think right now the university is realizing that they're behind in that as well.

Clearly, the feelings about the university’s commitment to creating greater opportunities for underrepresented students to get into college are complicated. Whereas some believe that UP is dedicated to this mission, others are not entirely sure. And perhaps the reason for that is because the issue itself is not so cut and dry. The general sense is that a public institution has a responsibility to work toward closing the educational achievement gap. But to what extent it is required to do that is unclear, as the comments by those interviewed reveal. As educators, the respondents understand that the university must maintain a level of academic expectation, and therefore cannot, or should not, lower its standards. But they also understand that using that as an excuse for inaction places these students right back into the educational hole that they have been trying to dig out of. Irene Williams, who has worked with Science and Math Outreach for three years, sums up the complexity of the commitment issue.

Everyone on average is like a 3 - 3.8 [GPA] and up to get into UP. And, I know people from like the 70s and 80s and they are just blown away like, “I went to UP. It wasn’t like that then.” It’s kind of like so far-fetched, so out of reach for certain kids who haven’t had the same opportunity like kids at [more affluent high schools] or some [other] district. It’s two different -- they [her students] didn’t have the same access. But then again you can’t just say, “Well, I’m sorry that --” They can’t just open their doors to everybody and “Let me give you a shot kid.” But again, they got to do -- it’s tough. It’s a double-edged sword. It’s a tough job to open the door to kids when you know they don’t have the same opportunity or chance [to] even be exposed to SMO or anything for that matter.

## Desire to Increase Engagement

Research on exchange relationships between organizations suggests that collaborations rarely exist solely within a dyadic association. Rather, most organizations belong to exchange networks, in which participant interaction with one partner impacts the entire network. “Networks are composed of exchange relations that are *connected* to the extent that exchange in one relation affects or is affected by the nature of the exchange in another relation” (Cook et al., 2006, p. 195). By Emerson’s (1962) conception, participating in exchange networks is a method of reducing the power one organization may have over another, as it provides alternative avenues for resource acquisition. In the case of many urban high schools, one could determine that participating in multiple academic outreach programs through multiple colleges and universities is an attempt to reduce their dependency on any one resource provider. However, what has emerged in this study is that the school partners do not want less engagement with higher education. Rather, because of the positive experiences that they have had, they wish that they could receive more support from their postsecondary partners.

For example, many of the counselors who participate in University Outreach discussed how thankful they are for what the program provides to them and their students. For Olivia Martin, although she is satisfied with the support that she has received from the program so far, she would love to get more.

I've been very happy with the program. It is one of the best programs that we have on our campus to offer the students. I was really happy with our reps this year. I just hope that we're able to maintain as an office and we're able to work with them and if we have them twice a week next year that would be amazing. But if we have them once a week then I will deal with what we have. But we've been -- we've been overall very happy with the program.

Similarly, Rhonda Nicolls expresses her contentment with what the program has meant for her vision for her work as a longtime counselor at multiple schools.

I've been very, very happy with them. I've worked at three different schools, so each school had a different personality and different administration and I've worked with different UO representatives along the way. I've been very, very happy, yes. I think the result is in the students. If students come into the college center and there's more and more students that come in -- that's a huge step. And that's what's happened. We have so many people at the outreach center, at the college center, and it draws students in and that's a good thing.

Rather than lament the fact that they must rely on an outside source to provide the level of advising that their school needs, the college counselors were profuse in their praise for University Outreach and what it has meant for them as educators. Loretta Nash remarked that it is one of the best things that she has participated in as an advisor, Henry Booker expressed his fortune to just be affiliated with the program, and Nan Camby asserted that she would not be able to help as many students without the aid of the UO staff. Perhaps Susan Kennedy, a veteran college counselor who has worked with various university-based programs, summed it up best: “I mean, the partnership is just really second to none…. I don't know where I would be without UP University Outreach.”

Furthermore, as this study has depicted, the counselors believe that University of the Public also receives significant benefit from having a program like University Outreach. For public universities, the partners suggest that academic outreach can help the institution maintain its relevance in communities where shrinking admissions rates and increased costs could cause the university to seem out of reach for the students living there. Randy Vale, who worked for UO before becoming the college counselor at Vista Verde High, talked to this point.

So I think at least these programs still being in existence is definitely helping to change some of that stigma, to show students and families that a school like UP is attainable. “Yeah, we have extremely low admissions rate. Yeah, we have extremely high application rate. That does not mean that this school is not available to you. We're still trying to help you to make you competitive so that you can be in that slot [to be] admitted.” So I definitely think that this program and other programs are still in great need, and I sincerely hope they maintain.

Although the teachers and counselors who participate in Science and Math Outreach were not as adamant in expressing their aspirations to continue their affiliation with University of the Public, this may be more a result of the differences in program structure than a reduced desire to carry on as SMO coordinators. In other words, UO provides support for what the counselors do on a daily basis, and therefore represents a thick level of partnership. If the program were to be eliminated all together, by the comments expressed here, it would be exceptionally damaging to the counselors’ abilities to provide the level of college advising that they want for their schools. Science and Math Outreach, on the other hand, represents a thinner level of partnership, largely because it is an extracurricular activity for both the students and the teachers, which means that the teachers can still do their “day jobs” without this added resource. In fact, to a certain degree, SMO represents what might better be seen as a *delegation* of responsibilities from the university to the school partners than a true collaborative partnership. If SMO were to be eliminated, it would be missed by the program coordinators in the schools and the students who participate in the competitions, but the teachers and counselors would still be able to attend to their regular jobs in much the same fashion as they did before they agreed to participate. That said, the findings in this study do reveal that the SMO participants see the program as a benefit for their work. Consequently, like their UO counterparts, there was a general sense among the SMO coordinators that they would like to continue, and perhaps even extend, their association.

For instance, Robert Whitaker has worked with various constituencies at the UP campus to help him in teaching his science classes, and expressed a desire to bring in more UP students to serve as tutors. “Because I’ve found that they don’t need to be paid, the tutors. The job is the reward. The dancer is the dance, kind of thing. It helps me, it helps them.” For Mr. Whitaker, the challenge is in trying to figure out how to navigate through the university bureaucracy to take advantage of the resources available. As he said, he would like to “harness that energy.”

Thus, the school personnel are not burdened by their association with UP. Instead, they see the university as a valuable partner in helping to educate their students. As has emerged throughout this study, these programs represent a reliance that the school partners are happy to have, and that they believe is shared by their higher education counterparts. Instead of the associations being defined by resource dependence, they would appear to be better characterized as measures of true interdependence.

**Discussion**

The modification of resource dependence theory that I put forward in this study provides some insight into why college counselors and teachers in high schools collaborate with university personnel for the purposes of providing academic preparation. Those who work in urban public high schools face steep odds in preparing their students to become college eligible and to be competitive applicants to prestigious universities in the state and across the country. Overwhelming numbers of students who would be first-generation college-goers, students who do not have time for extracurricular activities due to the need to work part-time, and environments not conducive to academic achievement are but a few of the conditions under which the school partners must work to help their students achieve their educational goals. Add to this the shrinking budgets for education that cause school personnel to consistently be asked to do more with less, and the need for assistance becomes evident. However, the school partners revealed that they work with their local universities not simply out of a need for resources, but also because they believe that higher education has a responsibility to address these issues and therefore need the school collaborators to help the university meet its civic duties. Thus, the idea of a civic interdependence emerges as a more nuanced lens through which to view these partnerships than simply assuming that the schools will take whatever help they can get.

As shown in Figure 1, the school partners believe that the need for resources goes both ways: that the school needs the help that the university can provide, and that the university needs access points into the school in order to help improve the educational achievement of underrepresented students. The school partners’ thinking appears to stem from the fact that they believe that colleges and universities, particularly public institutions, share their own social responsibility to address the higher education access gap among these students. Thus, school personnel participate in these efforts partially because of the interdependence they feel toward their university counterparts.

Moreover, the partners’ desire to participate in academic outreach extends beyond an awareness of the joint responsibility they have with higher education to increase postsecondary attendance among underrepresented students. Acknowledging this responsibility is one thing; doing something to meet it is another. What has emerged in this study is that because those in the schools are so dedicated to this cause, they appreciate the commitment that the institutional personnel demonstrate when they consistently strive to support the partners and their students. Due to these factors (the need for resources, the mutual responsibility to address the cause, and the shared commitment shown by the university staff) then, the school partners repeatedly expressed a desire to extend the level of engagement that they have with the university. Contrasting Emerson’s (1962) belief that an organization in a resource-dependent relationship will take steps to reduce that reliance as much as is feasible, what emerges here is that those in the schools want to increase their reliance on their postsecondary partner as much as the university staff want to be able to work with more schools and more students. Consequently, I posit a theory of civic interdependence to capture *both* the tangible motivations to affiliate, as well as the philosophical rationale.

**Figure 1. Theory of civic interdependence in school-university partnerships**

**Conclusions**

As this study reveals, the school partners who participate in academic outreach programs do so for a variety of reasons, ranging from assistance in meeting their own job responsibilities to a general belief in the social responsibility of higher education. What is also clear is that the motivations for participation differ between the programs, to some extent. Whereas the college counselors who work with University Outreach do so largely because of the fact that they are overburdened by the task presented to them, the teachers and counselors who serve as Science and Math Outreach coordinators at their respective schools seem to be motivated to a great extent by the fact that the program allows them to work with the students in a capacity beyond their regular duties. That is especially true in terms of the stipend paid to them. But what is also evident is that all of the school partners believe that the university has a responsibility to engage its local community in an effort to address the most pressing social challenges, such as the widening educational achievement gap that threatens to undermine efforts at diversifying higher education. That being the case, the partners believe that any reduction in funding that might eliminate these efforts would not only be difficult to overcome for them in their efforts to increase access, but would be incredibly damaging to the university’s social obligations. As we continue to reduce the amount of public funds aimed at higher education, it is important to keep in mind how external pressures, such as budgetary reductions, can not only have grave consequences on the effectiveness of the programs, but on the relationships colleges and universities have with their community partners as well.

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1. The names of all counselors and all schools have been changed to protect the confidentiality of the informants. See Appendix A for a listing of all interview participants, their schools, and their program affiliation. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)